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SUBJECT: MGLE01: UN SYG'S REPRESENTATIVE DISCUSSES
HIZBALLAH WITH S/CT COORDINATOR CRUMPTON

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Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
) .

SUMMARY

11. (S) In a 5/23 meeting, the UN Secretary-General's Personal Representative to Lebanon told visiting S/CT Coordinator Crumpton that Hizballah emerged as a "mixture" of Iranian Islamic-revolutionary links, social grievances in the Shi'a community, a fight against Israel, and what eventually became an "extremely complicated relationship" with the SARG and its security services. It is pulled in opposite directions by loyalty to the SARG versus an identification with Lebanon, a stake in a modicum of stability versus the need to give its full-time fighters a mission, and a claim to decide war and peace on its own versus the consensus-driven nature of Lebanese politics. To move the process of disarming Hizballah forward, he recommended that the international community: 1) "build more trust within Lebanon," and 2) "calm the regional situation." End summary.

12. (S) S/CT Coordinator Crumpton's May 22-23 visit to Beirut allowed an opportunity to compare notes with Geir Pedersen, the UN Secretary-General's Personal Representative to Lebanon. Pedersen and his staff, in their official capacities, frequently meet with representatives of Hizballah (although not, Pedersen insists -- denying persistent rumors to the contrary -- with Hassan Nasrallah). Conversation during a May 23 lunch meeting that included Ambassadors Crumpton and Feltman, Pedersen, Pedersen's senior political affairs officer Salman Shaikh, and emboff, focused on Hizballah and the problem of its disarmament, as called for by UNSCR 1559.

UNDERSTANDING HIZBALLAH

13. (S) Pedersen said that a proper understanding of Hizballah required that its origins be taken into account. He described how Hizballah started as a breakaway from the Amal Movement, and how it drew inspiration and support from the Islamic revolution in Iran. Israel's 1982 invasion mobilized a large segment of Lebanon's Shi'a population "fed up" with Amal's corruption, and this gave Hizballah an important boost. The presence of Iran's Islamic

Revolutionary Guard Corps in the Biqa'a Valley was another potent element in the making of Hizballah. Ultimately, Hizballah was "a mixture" of Iranian Islamic-revolutionary links, social grievances in the Shi'a community, a fight against Israel, and what eventually became an "extremely complicated relationship" with the SARG and its security services.

HIZBALLAH AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS

¶4. (S) Pedersen saw different strands within Hizballah's leadership. There was a "small group" that, over a year after the April 2005 withdrawal of Syrian military and overt intelligence personnel from Lebanon, remained loyal to President Asad's regime in Damascus. There was another group in the leadership that was more interested in the development of Lebanon. Hizballah representatives, however, always deny that such different schools of thought exist within their organization. Memories of a previous split that came out into the open, in 1992, made this a sensitive issue for them.

¶5. (S) Pedersen said that Hizballah's current leadership has an interest in maintaining a degree of stability in Lebanon, yet was faced with the problem of keeping its guerilla forces "focused," making sure that they "feel that they have a mission in life." Full-time fighters form an important constituency for Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah. This, Pedersen suggested, provided the context for Hizballah's paramilitary activities along Lebanon's border with Israel.

¶6. (S) Pedersen described as "the Hizballah contradiction" the fact that the organization necessarily looks to Iran's supreme leader as its own, yet it also has a stake in the national interests of Lebanon. Given the nature of Lebanon's confessional system of government, major political decisions tend to be made on the basis of consensus. However,

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Hizballah alone -- through its paramilitary presence along the border with Israel -- enjoys a virtual monopoly over decisions of war and peace. Hizballah persists in holding onto this monopoly, even as it realizes that its case for doing so is "weak." It is "going to get more interesting" as this particular contradiction is explored, said Pedersen.

"EDUCATING" HIZBALLAH?

¶7. (S) Pedersen suggested that there might be opportunities to "educate" Hizballah by forcing it to define what, exactly, was the "Israeli threat" to Lebanon. He noted that continued Israeli overflights of Lebanese territory helped create a popular perception of an Israeli threat, which in turn bolstered Hizballah's argument for holding onto its arms. Israeli overflights almost stopped during March and April, and Hizballah had taken notice. Resumed Israeli restraint -- following a sharp escalation in overflights since April -- could serve this objective, Pedersen said.

¶8. (S) Pedersen suggested that Hizballah be urged to "put Israel to the test," that is, to stand down its paramilitary activities on the border in anticipation of reciprocal Israeli behavior with overflights. However, he said, Hizballah's leadership probably does not want Israel to cease overflights. This is because doing so would put the onus on Hizballah to take steps towards disarmament. (Ambassador Feltman noted Hizballah's stepped-up level of military construction along the Blue Line as a probable reason for the resumption of Israeli overflights at record levels -- Hizballah was not making the case for Israeli restraint any easier in doing so.)

SYRIA'S ROLE

¶9. (S) Pedersen said that the ongoing National Dialogue process -- which brings Hizballah's Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, to the negotiating table with the leadership of Lebanon's other main factions -- has provided a helpful change of atmosphere. Its participants initially arrived at consensus on several important issues, including support for a continued international investigation of the Hariri assassination and restriction of Palestinian arms and fighters to the refugee camps. Later on in the process, however, things "fell apart."

¶10. (S) Explaining how this may have happened, Pedersen said he understood that Hizballah's leadership had approached the SARG leadership for approval of the National Dialogue consensus. When the answer from Damascus was negative, Hizballah was caught in a bind. Since it could not publicly put the blame for an impasse on its historic ally, the SARG, "Hizballah decided to blame it on March 14," that is, on the pro-sovereignty alliance led by Sa'ad Hariri and Walid Jumblatt, the base of support in Parliament for Prime Minister Siniora's government.

¶11. (S) This was a sign, Pedersen said, that Hizballah does not want to "confront Syria." Hizballah appears to be assuming that the SARG will emerge intact or even strengthened at the end of its current travail, which includes the UN investigation of the Hariri assassination. The SARG is still "key" in Lebanon, Pedersen said, because "so many people here are keyed to it rather than to Lebanese interests." He noted, however, that, in his private meetings with Hizballah officials, "they're much more critical of Syria" than they are in public.

THINKING ABOUT NEXT STEPS -----

¶12. (S) Pedersen said that any solution of the Hizballah problem required a two-pronged approach on the part of the international community: 1) "build more trust within Lebanon," and 2) "calm the regional situation." On this second point, greater "clarity on the Iranian nuclear file" would help. Given the SARG's nonchalant response to UNSCR 1680, clearly a more concerted approach to Syria on the part of UN member states was needed as well. It would involve an "approach to Putin," said Pedersen, who referred to reports that the Russian government is "increasingly frustrated" with the SARG.

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¶13. (S) Wondering whether it would be possible to get Hizballah to think about "the day after" a decision to disarm, Pedersen described the issues that would be of primary concern to Hizballah's leadership. First, they would be concerned about their own physical safety. In addition, they would be concerned about providing social services (in other words, political patronage) at current levels as a genuinely Lebanese institution, one presumably not enjoying as much Iranian largesse as it does today.

HIZBALLAH AT A CROSSROADS? -----

¶14. (S) Ambassador Crumpton suggested that Libya might be a positive example for Hizballah, should it seek an exit from the USG's list of designated foreign terrorist organizations. Carrying this idea a step further, Salman Shaikh suggested that the USG consider publicly stating that it saw Hizballah at a "crossroads," and that it had an opportunity to make a Libya-style change of direction, getting out of the terrorism business in the process.

¶15. (S) Hizballah's main political opponents in Lebanon, the pro-sovereignty "March 14" coalition, also had a great deal of work to do, according to Pedersen. To date, "March 14"

had yet to provide a unified, well thought-out approach to the ultimate goal of Hizballah's disarmament. "What exactly would they propose," he asked?

¶16. (S) Shaikh suggested that we have a message aimed at concentrating the attention of Lebanese interlocutors on the need to disarm both Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, as called for in UNSCR 1559. While many of our Lebanese interlocutors refer to the need to preserve "stability" as an excuse not to take steps forward, current events were demonstrating that the status quo is not tenable, he said.

COMMENT

¶17. (S) The fatal shooting of a Lebanese Armed Forces soldier by Palestinian rejectionist militiamen in the Biqa'a Valley is the most recent example of an untenable status quo. The Lebanese government has avoided the problem of disarming Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias -- even the ones with by far the least local support, namely, Palestinian rejectionist bases outside the refugee camps -- in the interest of "stability." In reality, the result of this hyper-risk-averse approach is likely to be the opposite.

FELTMAN